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V CORPS ARTILLERY SOLDIERS GRAPPLE WITH UNIQUE HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT TRAINING

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BABENHAUSEN, Germany -- There was a whole lot of punching, kicking and blocking going on here last week.



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Sgt. Walter Vasquezbenavente practices a jujitsu move on Sgt. Simion Cruz during a self-defense class in Babenhausen, Germany February 2.

The flying fists and feet belonged to about 30 Soldiers from V Corps', 1st Battalion, 27th Field Artillery, who participated in a weeklong, hand-to-hand combat self-defense training course from January 31 to February 4.

The course was taught by the Gracie family of the Gracie Jui-Jitsu Academy in Los Angeles, Calif. The Gracies are known for their Brazilian jujitsu style of fighting seen in ultimate fighting championships.

Soldiers received hands-on training in the techniques of G.R.A.P.L.E. -- Gracie Resisting Attack Procedures for Law Enforcement -- designed to give troops the skills needed to control but not necessarily hurt an enemy, said Rorion Gracie.

"War today is in an urban environment," said Gracie. "Soldiers need to be able to control their enemy. These skills are important for them to have."

During the "train the trainer" program, the Soldiers learned a variety of skills that they will pass along to the rest of the troops in their units, including basic maneuvers such as blocking a punch; taking the opponent to the ground; safely closing the distance to an opponent, and escaping from a variety of positions.

"Ultimately you want to be able to control the guy, and not kill him if you don't need to," said Gracie.

Relating the training to his deployment to Iraq in 2003, Staff Sgt. Joao Denobrega said the training instills confidence in Soldiers.

"[The training] teaches how to protect and defend," said Denobrega. "It gives you confidence with your hands, especially ... those guys who haven't been downrange."

That confidence is exactly the reason the training was brought to the Soldiers, said Capt. Will Daniel, who arranged the training after discovering the Gracies' web site.

"We didn't shoot missiles the entire time while we were in Iraq," said Daniel. "Every Soldier has to be infantry at one point or another and we all have to know hand-to-hand combat."

A family affair, Rorion taught the Soldiers alongside his 23-year-old son, Rylon, who also teaches at the academy alongside his two brothers and three sisters.

"It's the best tool you can give someone," said Gracie. "Weapons are a good tool, but you need confidence behind every Soldier."

